

**Fairfield Association**  
**FAUNA and Orchard sub-Group [FOG]**  
**Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 7th March 2013, 7.30 pm**  
**at The Robert Gillow**

**Present:** Graham Brandwood, Andrew Brennand, Dave Brookes, Glenys Ferguson (mins), Tony Finn, Oliver Fulton, Helen Hicks, Ian Procter, Rebecca Procter, Hilary Short, Mick Short (chair), Annie Watson (part), Chris Workman.

1. **Apologies:** Sue Nieduszynska,
2. **Minutes of last meeting:** Accepted.
3. **Friends of the Storey Gardens:** Annie Watson, Chair of the recently formed Friends of the Storey Gardens, joined the meeting to observe and make more contacts. The group's aim is to re-open this special garden in the heart of Lancaster to the general public after a long closure. FOG welcomed this and expressed support for the group. To help with fundraising, Hilary advised submitting a prompt application for an 'Awards for All' grant.
4. **Current/recent developments:**
  - **Frog spawn collectors:** A man with a young child was challenged about trespassing in the Hay Meadow. They had been trying to collect frog spawn from Cromwell's Pond. (Without success as there is none in the pond at the moment.)
  - **Campers in the Orchard:** Campers have returned to the north end of the Orchard. The PCSO has been notified.
5. **Matters arising from Minutes:**
  - **Steam machine:** Helen has had a response from her French contact. The machine is expensive and not really suitable for the proposed tasks. No further action.
  - **Thursday as regular meeting night:** Agreed.
  - **Payment for haylage:** Received.
6. **Report from the FA meeting:** Simon Gershon and others have formed a Community Land Trust with the aim of raising finance to buy land. Arrangements for the Easter Egg Hunt are in hand.
7. **FLORA update:** Fundraising continues.
8. **FAUNA:**
  - **Monthly inspection including winter flush count:** Full report available. No problems overall. Following the repair (see item 9) Anna's Pool is holding water well. Richard Storton (RSPB) will be gradually adjusting the pipe to establish the right level. Having only one person instead of three may have affected the results of the second (and final) flush count for this winter. Even so, the total of 40 snipe is encouraging, particularly when some were found in School Pond despite its current poor state (see item 18). **Graham** agreed to add the padlocks on the bollards at the end of Sunnyside Lane to his inspection list.

- **Final snagging and completion certificate:** Snagging work and dealing with the flooding of the FAUNA footpath by the Paddock gate has been on hold pending clarification of the situation with regards to the Paddock hedging (see below). It can now go ahead as soon as possible. In addition, Hanafins will also be asked to install a water trough for the cattle and extend the hardcore track to improve the access through Carr House Meadow (see item 18). **Oliver** and **Dave** will confirm with the graziers and instruct Hanafins.
- **Breeding birds and hare survey arrangements:** Dan Haywood is producing a spreadsheet of last season's results for publication on the website. He will know shortly whether he will be around to repeat his survey this year. **Oliver** will make alternative arrangements if Dan is unavailable. Oliver has asked Clare Brown to add any hare sightings reported to her onto the wildlife blog on the FA website. She has had a good report from Philip Turner recently and has heard of other sightings anecdotally.
- **Paddock hedging:** Following the meeting with the Tree Protection Officer and Natural England reported last month, Ian and Glenys met with Sam Hanafin (contractor) and his tree consultant, Roger Cartwright, on site on 12 February. As a result:
  - a) the western boundary will be left untouched for the immediate future, although the longer it is left the more likely it becomes that the work will have to be funded by the FA rather than Natural England;
  - b) an application has been submitted to Lancaster City Council in relation to the eastern boundary. If there is no response by 4th April then the work can go ahead. If any tree protection orders are imposed by LCC, then an appeal may be made (Roger considers the grounds for appeal are good). In either outcome, it will be too late for a start to be made this winter. The hedging and the associated allotment fencing will therefore be delayed until late autumn.

Hilary queried whether the hedging work in the Paddock would be done more sensitively by volunteers rather than by the contractors. However, the task has to be done at the same time as the fence construction and the nature of the boundary presents a stiff challenge for volunteers in terms of equipment and expertise. It was suggested that the contractors be given a detailed briefing and closely monitored (**Ian**).

9. **Volunteer activities:** Ian's full reports of a very busy month are attached at the end. Hazel in the west Pads hedge is being laid rather than coppiced, largely for cosmetic reasons. It was agreed that blackthorn and hawthorn will be planted in these sparse areas in Saturday's volunteer session. Once these are sufficiently well established, the hazels can be coppiced. The semi-mature sycamore are overshadowing the hedge and should be removed. It was suggested that this would be done individually and on a phased basis, again subject to the maturity of other plants in the vicinity. **Ian** (with others) will review this strategy on site on Saturday. Elder is also being removed, and the stumps will be treated with herbicide as the season starts.

Three out of the seven bird boxes cleaned had been occupied, probably by blue tits.

The Woodland Trust pack of 420 whips of five species has been delivered, so the planned planting session can go ahead on Saturday. The two oak saplings will be heeled in somewhere for potential use in the FLORA copse (**Ian**).

It is too late now to coppice the hazel clump by Towneley Close revealed by the work in the last volunteer session. It was suggested that these trees might actually be alder (**Ian** to investigate).

**Oliver** will seek advice from Reuben Neville (LWT) about whether and when to sow extra wildflower seeds by the FAUNA stones. It was suggested that the poor result in the first season might be due to the fact that the area was not seeded until the end of May.

10. **Tree survey:** Andy Lee has inspected the major trees in both the Orchard and FAUNA. His report has yet to be received.
11. **Educational activities:** Tony had several items to report:
  - Year 2 pupils from Dallas Road School enjoyed a session in the Orchard yesterday;
  - The new booking form and risk assessment have been used twice now, and appear to be working well;
  - Recent coppicing activity by volunteers has created a useful space in the Orchard for educational activities and the extra wood piles are useful;
  - Thanks to Julia McDowell, there is now an active Learning Zone area on the website. It is encouraging that children who have visited the Orchard are contributing to the Learning Zone blog.
  - Tony has been asked by the leader of the planning group of the Fruity Corners project in Scotch Quarry to attend a meeting and provide advice on developing educational activities;
  - A query has been received via the FA website from the educational officer of the charity 'WildAid'. **Tony** will contact him to clarify his request. It was pointed out that, should he be wishing to help at an FA organised session, then child protection issues arise: any 'unknown' helpers must be carefully appraised.
  - In addition to the curriculum related activities regularly offered, Tony is planning to promote two specific 'fun' activities: nestbuilding and story telling. The latter is a follow-on from the book week at Willow Lane school, using the Orchard as the inspiration for stories.
  - A requirement of the Community Spaces Sustainability grant is that educational use of FAUNA and the Orchard is extended to a larger number of schools. Last year Tony made a considerable effort to contact new schools, but with little success (distance to travel probably an issue). He will follow up these approaches.
12. **Emergency toilet arrangements:** Three householders living close to the Orchard have kindly offered to be on standby to provide access to their toilets in emergencies, during educational or volunteer sessions. This will usually be arranged through **Tony**, although the contact information will also be held by Glenys (**Tony** to forward).
13. **North Lancs Naturalists Group workshops:** Chris reported that, as part of its summer programme, the group plans to lead two workshops / bioblitzes in the Orchard/FAUNA.

Members of the group will come to sample the nature reserve habitats and build up the species list started last summer. At the 'events' any local residents interested can come and help sample and identify the organisms. It is hoped to set up a light trap for moths on one or both of the occasions. The workshops will take place on Friday 7<sup>th</sup> June (7pm onwards to include searching for bats and moths) and Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> September (10am to 12 or later). It was agreed that the first of these sessions would be promoted as part of 'Go Wild' (series to be discussed at next FOG – **Oliver**). The meeting was saddened to hear that people attending these workshops will not be able to enjoy the companionship and expert knowledge of Jennifer Newton, who died a few days ago after a long illness.

14. **Edenbreck boundary and garden, Concessionary Path Agreement:** Ann Wood (Lancaster City Council) is proposing a slight re-alignment of the boundary to the north of the tool shed to incorporate the Granell-Watson's chicken run. This will still leave an adequate margin of about 6 foot around the side of the tool shed. It currently seems unlikely that the Granell-Watson's will proceed with buying the piece of land to the east of the tool shed to extend their garden. The sale of the piece of land at the Cromwell Road end of the FAUNA footpath to the Loxams is more likely to go ahead. Ann is also making good progress on the Concessionary Path Agreement and is liaising with the County Council. Oliver has sent her the FAUNA 'Rules' notice, and reminded her to include key elements, such as keeping dogs on leads and no cycling except by permit.
15. **Tool shed: funding and construction:** The builder started on site on 4th March. The target completion date is the 1st April. The concrete base of the old pig sty has been removed and the footings are being installed. Hilary and others have met to discuss materials. Cladding will now be Cornish larch. It has been agreed that volunteers will not be involved in tasks such as cladding, but will help with 'housekeeping' activities. Ian has about eight people on standby, and will be contacted by the builder directly when their services are required. **Hilary** is holding a copy of the builder's health and safety documents and will forward this to Ian, as well as add it to Dropbox. She will chase the builder for a copy of his insurance certificate. Two payments have been made so far to cover materials and labour.
16. **Health and Safety Policy:** Progress on contributions to the appendices to be submitted to the FA:
  - a) Policy for FAUNA fields. Still not finished (**Oliver**).
  - b) Guidance for external contractors. Still not finished (**Dave**).
17. **Canal & Rivers Trust Walk:** John Roff from the Canal and Rivers Trust is promoting an idea to create some self-guided walks around Lancaster for a big web-based project called Discovering Britain. He has approached FOG about writing a walk of between 2 & 6 miles that 'tells a story' about some aspect of geography / landscape. Sue and Ian have expressed an interest. Oliver has forwarded their names to John, who has yet to contact them.
18. **Carr House Farm:** The agreement with Natural England is quite complex in its requirements relating to the grazing of the FAUNA fields (numbers of cattle, where they can be at different times of the year, sward height requirements). It has become clear that FOG should play a more active part in helping the graziers meet Natural England's environmental prescriptions, and that extra capital works are required to make the agreement work (see also item 8):
  - a) A cattle access timetable (circulated) has been drafted by Glenys and Oliver. There are still some queries to be discussed with Natural England before the timetable can be shared with the graziers (**Oliver** to finalise with Nigel Pilling). Natural England stresses

that sward height is more important than livestock units. **Glenys** will keep an eye on the locations of the cattle. This will also now be reported by Graham in his monthly inspection (see item 19). **Graham** will be monitoring sward height too. If there are concerns about the state of a particular field, advice will be sought from Richard Storton.

- b) School Pond provides the only source of water when the cattle are in the Grammar School Field. As a result, they have been in School Pond during periods when they should not have access. To rectify this problem, a water trough will be installed in the 'Gun Range' (FA land, but not part of the Natural England agreement). Subject to agreement with the graziers, it is likely that this will be on the north side of the gate from Carr House Paddock into the Grammar School Field. The pipe (lagged or in a small trench) could come up the boundary wall with the LGGs artificial pitch and link to a water supply just inside the Loxams' garden. Natural England has agreed to provide extra funding that should cover most if not all of the cost of the trough, hardstanding and pipework.
- c) Supplementary feeding of the cattle is not allowed in the FAUNA fields. However, the graziers currently have difficulty delivering feed into the Gun Range. The existing hard core track in Carr House Meadow will be extended up to the gateway into the Gun Range to facilitate access by landrover or tractor. This extension will have to be funded by the FA.

19. **Monitoring of Natural England Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) Success Indicators:**

Devising the cattle access timetable drew on Part 3 of the Natural England Agreement. This specifies a number of 'success indicators' which relate to the state of the sward and so are of direct relevance to the management of the cattle (item 18). The opportunity was taken to consolidate these and the various other 'success indicators' specified in Part 3 into a single document (draft circulated) to form the basis for establishing a more formal system for monitoring the environmental development of the area covered by the Natural England Agreement. The document shows the dates by which these success indicators should be attained and the means by which progress will be monitored (such as wildflower surveys, winter flush counts).

It was recognised that several of the indicators could be tackled by Graham in conjunction with his monthly maintenance inspection (item 8). His first HLS monitoring report was circulated. As expected (see item 18), the main problem identified was the state of School Pond, where the presence of the cattle has created extensive poaching and bare patches and the rushes have been badly cropped. In contrast, the sward in Big Meadow, to which the cattle were re-admitted on 1 March, is in relatively good condition. But with the grass just starting to grow it needs careful oversight, particularly if it turns wet.

Monitoring certain of the success indicators requires expertise beyond the scope of FOG members. The RSPB's Richard Storton has already been giving advice and monitoring informally, particularly in relation to Upper Sowerholme and the reedbed options. He is happy to continue this and submit a more formal and regular report. (**Glenys** to liaise with Richard.)

The Natural England Agreement also relates to the Orchard. **Glenys** will discuss with Keith Taylor who prunes the fruit trees how best to produce a formal (annual?) report on their health.

20. **Local Nature Reserve designation & FAUNA Management Plan:** The application for Local Nature Reserve designation prepared by Richard Storton is almost ready to be advertised to the general public. **Oliver** is continuing to liaise with Richard and Ann Wood.

Natural England has advised that a management plan that conforms to particular guidelines must be submitted within twelve months of designation as a local nature reserve. **Oliver** has offered to draft this, and can draw in part on information in the Natural England Agreement. Work done in relation to items 18 and 19 above will contribute to this plan, and Glenys has already drawn on this to draft an Annual Work Programme for FAUNA (following the format of the one developed by Graeme Skelcher for the Orchard). This draft was circulated, and **members of the meeting** were asked to provide feedback to Glenys (queries, additions, amendments).

21. **Dog fouling:** This appears to be on the increase. Philip Turner, who regularly clears dog mess from the Pads public footpath with his spade, has picked up some new notices from the City Council and wants to mount them on plywood backing at various strategic points, screwed to fence posts wherever possible. There was concern that too many notices were appearing, and that many offenders will ignore them. However, the meeting recognised that the problem should be addressed and agreed that Philip be asked to go ahead and install in his suggested locations:

1. At the Cromwell Road end on the corner of the gate next to the dog poo bin.
2. On the way from Sunnyside Lane to the Orchard entrance, on the wooden fence next to the big sycamores in the Paddock Hedge just south of the tool shed.
3. On the way down the public footpath from Aldcliffe Road, on a post at the point where the track becomes a footpath
4. On the way down from the Orchard to Lucy Brook, on the fence next to the seat nearest the brook.

In addition, a fifth notice will be sited by the Towneley Close entrance. **Graham** offered to install a post, if no other mounting site is available. It was suggested that the signs be taken down at some point – to be put out again later – to keep the issue fresh. (**Mick** to liaise with Philip)

With the children's Easter Egg hunt imminent, **Mick** will approach the Dog Warden about visiting the Orchard to try to dissuade the less public-minded dog-fouling owners. He will also ask whether the Dog Warden can help enforce the requirement to keep dogs on leads on the FAUNA footpath.

22. **Improved communication with the public:** As requested at the previous meeting, Ian has been considering how best to improve communication with the public. His advice is that the FA should *inform the public whenever it is not self evident what we are doing* and respond quickly if a problem emerges. Since the complaint about hedge laying in January, Ian has posted notices in the Orchard regarding Hedge Laying and Pruning the Fruit Hedge and had

them posted on Facebook and the Volunteering Blog. In the coming months he anticipates posting notices (both physically and digitally) with regard to spraying the edges of the FAUNA path with herbicide to prevent the grass encroaching into the gravel and spot spraying ragwort and thistles. As the notice boards are often full he intends to post notices near where the specific tasks are being carried out, as illustrated by the recent signs in the Orchard. This gives a more direct message. However, a side effect is clutter in the Orchard and the signs must be removed after an appropriate time (**Ian**).

Andrew noted that there are problems with the hinges on the noticeboard at the north end of the Orchard because the plywood is failing. **Helen** offered to investigate and arrange for it to be repaired.

23. **AOB:** Natural England has advised that the FAUNA footpath has reduced the hay meadow area, and that the Grammar School Field boundary has been wrongly mapped. These changes have implications for the size of the HLS payment. **Oliver** will submit the revisions to the Rural Payments Agency so that the payment can be adjusted. **Chris** offered to help Oliver produce a more accurate map.
24. **Date / place of next meeting:** 7.30pm Thursday 4th April (Robert Gillow, to be chaired by Mick), Thursday 2nd May (Robert Gillow, to be chaired by Oliver)

## **Ian Procter's Volunteer Items:**

### **Fixing bird boxes 4<sup>th</sup> February 2013**

Two rather windblown volunteers assisted Richard Storton (RSPB) in erecting 18 bird and bat boxes. In more detail:

- On the big ash tree half way along the fauna path
  - Two tit boxes
- In the Sowerholme willows
  - One owl box
  - Three tit boxes
  - Two bat boxes
- On the ash tree at the western entry to the Fauna path
  - One tit box
  - Two bat boxes (American)
- On the ??? tree at the eastern end of the Towneley path
  - One tit box
- On the sycamore just to the south of the Towneley path
  - One owl box
- On the silver birch to the west of the fruit hedge
  - One tit box
- On the alder toward the southern end of the Orchard
  - One tit box
- On the oak tree on the Pads path just before the Lucy Brook corner
  - Two bat boxes (One American)
- On the willow adjacent to Lucy Brook in the Big Meadow
  - One kestrel box

NB the bat boxes are in two shapes one being the 'American' style which can be looked into from below.

### **Hedge laying working parties**

*5<sup>th</sup> February 2013*

Seven volunteers made good progress in the areas agreed by FOG around the middle entrance of the Orchard.

Points:

1. Once again the occurrence of thorn bushes is poor, the effects of competitive species I think. So we took the decision to include hazel in the laying rather than coppicing it which once again would have left large gaps in the hedge. This decision can be reversed if FOG thinks it is the wrong one. Whether or not we leave the hazel as laid hedge, we could plant some saplings in March, if we are getting 400+ then there should be ample.
2. Notices have been posted which include the mention of red markers around trees which we are leaving.  
Most of these are semi-mature sycamores, six in number. As noted these will remain for the moment, for one thing several them are beyond our laying tools and really need a chain saw. But FOG needs to decide what to do about them. This is a long term decision, I will note to remind FOG as next winter approaches.
3. Fraser has kindly offered us his bonfire site at the bottom of his garden and to burn the brash along with his waste. This is not just for now but for the medium term. As it seems that Hanafins will not be available to chip our brash this winter this seems a valuable offer.

Philip Turner passed by and I took the opportunity to mention to him about raising the level of trim on hedges on an annual basis. He agreed to do this, indeed regarding it as self evident. (FOG Minutes item 19)

*12<sup>th</sup> February 2013*

Five volunteers turned out. We concentrated again on the area around the Orchard middle entrance. As well as laying hedge we removed a considerable amount of elder. This was all carted away to the bonfire site in Fraser's garden.

*20<sup>th</sup> February 2013*

Seven volunteers continued the work. We have now completed about 70 metres of hedge around the middle entrance and we hope this demonstrates to the public the hedge laying we want to continue next year. We have had several very positive comments from passers by which has been very encouraging. We also continued to remove elder trees from the hedge. The remaining stumps will be treated with herbicide once the growing season starts. Note that we have left two elders near the hedge and there are several (five I think) sizeable specimens in the Orchard. Most of our brash has been carted away but some of the elder remains for the next volunteer session.

### **Additional First Aid box**

As requested (FOG 30<sup>th</sup> Jan item 11) I have acquired a second first aid box after taking advice from *First Aid Cumbria*.

### **Volunteer session on the morning of 9<sup>th</sup> February 2012**



12 local volunteers were joined by 12 students from Green Lancaster on a damp morning, given the weather forecast we were relieved to stay moist rather than wet.

This was the first occasion in which Green Lancaster and I used the *Booking Form for External Groups*. I attach a copy of the completed form as an APPENDIX for information although I don't intend to do this on a regular basis. I will simply keep the completed forms in my file. Note that copies of Green Lancaster's insurance certificates have been lodged with the FOG secretary.

1. We completed retrieving decent bricks from the pig sty site and stacking them for future use.
2. By agreement with Fraser, corrugated iron sheets stripped from his barn roof were salvaged and stored with the bricks. (Possible use for bonfires as advised by Natural England).
3. Self seeded saplings and bramble were lopped down in several areas of the Orchard but especially the north of the Towneley Close path and around the tall sycamore adjacent to the stump circle. In the former location a clump of hazel were revealed which badly need coppicing. Large amounts of brash were stacked tidily.
4. Two new wood piles for insects were formed to the south of the Towneley Close path.
5. Blackthorn in the fruit hedge were pruned back, some severely as advised in the Management Plan, others cut back to continue to support the fruit. A notice was posted informing the public what was being done.
6. Bird boxes were cleaned out. Nests were found in three of them and retrieved for educational demonstration. We noted where repairs to the boxes were needed.
7. Pruning of the apple trees progressed. Note, Keith has been doing this on his own for some time. It seems sensible for him to pass on to others just how to prune the apple trees. We agreed that he will give a demonstration at a volunteer session in the near future.

### **Volunteering with Lancashire Wildlife Trust 14<sup>th</sup> February 2013**

Nine Fairfield Association volunteers assisted Steve Rider of the Lancashire Wildlife Trust at Freeman's Pools in part 'repayment' for the help given to us with haymaking. We planted up a new hedge with whips and then removed redundant plastic supports from established plants.

### **Anna's Pool: Sowerholme Bund Repair**

*22<sup>nd</sup> February 2013*

Our assistance at Freeman's Pools pays dividends as Steve Rider made available a digger 'scoopful' of clay for us to repair the Sowerholme pond bund. Three volunteers loaded two trailer loads of clay and transported it to Cromwell Road.

*25<sup>th</sup> February 2013*

Five volunteers assisted Richard Storton in repairing the bund. This involved dismantling the hazel fence around the bund, digging out the pipe, transporting the clay from Cromwell Road (partly using a corrugated iron walkway), puddling a bed of clay for the pipe, constructing a clay dam around the pipe, rebuilding the bund, reinstating the fence and removing the walkway back to the pig sty area. Exhausting work but we are optimistic of success.

### **Proposed tasks for volunteer morning 9<sup>th</sup> March 2013**

Once again we have a group of Green Lancaster students due to assist us.

1. Top priority is planting out hedge saplings which will be delivered from The Woodland Trust in the week before the volunteer day. They are to fill gaps in the Fauna hedge especially down the Pads path. They are also to gap up the Orchard side of the Pads path. The obvious space is at the northern end but there is a section near the southern end which needs a bit of clearance of dead wood and new saplings.
2. Also toward the southern end of the Orchard are some felled elders which we did not have time to clear at the last hedge laying session. They need to be carted to the bonfire piles in Fraser's garden.
3. Keith Taylor plans to continue pruning the apple trees. If any volunteers want to assist and learn from Keith he is happy to share his knowledge.
4. We also need to prune the gooseberries and redcurrants in the fruit hedge. There is a useful short video in which Monty Don shows how to do it at

<http://www.gardenersworld.com/how-to/projects/creative-projects/how-to-winter-prune-gooseberries-and-redcurrants/122.htm>

5. Clearing the copse adjacent to the Towneley Close path last time revealed a clutch of hazels which badly need coppicing. If they are not done soon they will get too big. There will be some excellent hedge stakes here and these can be saved and stored at the northern end of the Paddock ready for storage around the new shed.
6. Clear enveloping bramble from around the new saplings in the Fauna hedge alongside the Grammar School field.
7. There is a pile of hedge stakes near the Orchard middle entrance which can be moved to the northern end of the Paddock. Graham's stumps, currently in the Allotments hedge of the Paddock can also be moved to a more secure place as that hedge is to be laid at some point.
8. The notices which have been posted to inform the public of our activities (and protect wood piles from firewood scavengers) can be removed.
9. Begin the strimming of the longer grass in the Orchard.

Note for the FOG meeting: should we sow some more wildflower seeds around the Fauna stones area? If yes, where can they be sourced for sowing from April?